

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Fuel cell system and control method

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to an operation control apparatus for a fuel cell suitable to prevent it from deteriorating and method for controlling thereof.

 When the fuel cell characteristic is changed by deterioration or load is changed rapidly, the DC output of the fuel cell reduces
10 below a set value transitionally, even if reaction gas is supplied and the fuel cell itself is normal.

 Japanese Laid-open Patent Publication 2000-21429 discloses that a load setting value is reduced in accordance with reduction of the fuel cell voltage to protect it by operation of a reverse converter,
15 when the voltage of the fuel cell falls down.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 In the above conventional reference, the load setting value is reduced according to the amount of voltage reduction of the fuel cell.
20 For this reason, if the load setting value is fallen down by load change, the current outputted from the fuel cell will also be changed. Moreover, since the load setting value is only reduced in accordance with the amount of voltage reduction, there is a possibility of deteriorating the fuel cell when the fuel cell has taken load just
25 before the protection stop level thereof.

 An object of the present invention is to provide an operation control apparatus for the fuel cell suitable to fall-down of the fuel cell

current without influence of load change, when the voltage of the fuel cell falls.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a control apparatus of the fuel cell which controls the output of the fuel cell to
5 about zero near the voltage-drop protection stop level of the fuel cell.

According to one aspect of the present invention, the invention provides an operation control method for a fuel cell, wherein the fuel cell is connected to an AC power system through a power converter and electric power is supplied to a load from
10 connection portion between the AC power system and the power converter, and the power instruction value is applied to the power converter in accordance with the load power, the method comprising steps of:

detecting the voltage of the fuel cell;
15 reducing the limit value of the power instruction in response to the drop of the fuel cell voltage; and
setting the power instruction value as the limit value when the voltage of the fuel cell reduces to a first threshold value.

According to another aspect of the invention, the output
20 current of the fuel cell begin to reduce when the fuel cell current reduce to the first threshold value and the electric power instruction value is reduced to zero when the fuel cell voltage reduce to the second threshold value.

According to another aspect of the invention, an operation
25 control apparatus comprising:

a fuel cell;

a power converter connected between said fuel cell and the AC

power system;

a load receiving the electric power from connection portion between said fuel cell and the AC power system;

a power instruction means for outputting the power
5 instruction value of the fuel cell to the power converter in accordance with the load power, and

a limiter for detecting the fuel cell voltage and reducing the limit value of the power instruction value in accordance with the fuel cell voltage drop and the power instruction value being set as the
10 limit value when the fuel cell voltage falls down to the first threshold value.

The limiter detects the output current of the fuel cell and the difference between the output current and the power instruction value. Additionally, the limiter regulates the duty instruction value
15 so as to reduce the difference to zero and set the duty instruction value as a gate pulse of the power converter by comparing the duty instruction value with a triangle wave.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

20 Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the fuel cell operation control apparatus according to an embodiment 1 of this invention;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing a DC voltage controller;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing a coordinated current regulator;

25 Fig. 4 is a block diagram showing a current regulator which drives a DC/DC converter;

Fig. 5 is a block diagram showing an electric power

instruction operation element;

Fig. 6 is a block diagram showing a current limiter according to the embodiment 1 of the present invention;

Fig. 7 is a diagram showing operation of the current limiter
5 according to the embodiment 1 of the present invention 1;

Fig. 8 is a block diagram showing the fuel cell operation control apparatus according to an embodiment 2 of the present invention;

Fig. 9 is a block diagram showing the AC current regulator
10 according to the embodiment 2 of the present invention; and

Fig. 10 is a block diagram showing an current regulator according to the embodiment 2 of the present invention.

15 DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

An embodiment of the present invention is hereafter explained using from Fig. 1 to 7. Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the system configuration of the operation control apparatus of a fuel cell according to an embodiment of the present invention. Fig.1 is a
20 circuit diagram of a voltage type electric power converter with function to transform the DC electric power to the single phase AC electric power or single phase AC electric power into DC electric power.

In Fig. 1, the fuel cell (FC) 1 is connected to the DC/DC converter 2 which changes DC voltage into DC voltage in Fig. 1. The
25 DC/DC converter 2 is connected to a DC side capacitor C2 of the converter (inverter) 3 which transforms DC electric power into AC

power, and the AC output terminal of the converter 3 is connected to a reactor L which constitutes the AC filter for removing high harmonics. The reactor L is connected to the capacitor C1 constituting the AC filter and a circuit breaker BR. The circuit
5 breaker BR is connected to the electric power system 4. A load 5, such as, home electric appliances, an electric lights, and machine tools, are connected between the circuit breaker BR and the electric power system 4.

The fuel cell 1 is connected to a piping PP1, and the piping
10 PP1 is connected to a valve VV for fuel adjustment. The valve VV for fuel adjustment regulates the amount of the fuel which flows into the piping PP1 through a piping PP2. The fuel cell 1, for example, reforms commercial gas and converts it to hydrogen rich fuel. The DC voltage is generated by the chemical reaction of the hydrogen rich gas and air. The generated DC voltage is supplied to the DC/DC converter
15 2.

The detection value IL of a current detector CT1 installed in the input side of load 5 and the detection value VL of the voltage detection means PT for detecting the voltage of the electric power
20 system 41 are inputted into an electric power instruction operation element 6. The electric power instruction operation element 6 outputs the opening degree signal SV of the valve VV for fuel adjustment to the valve VV, and calculates power instruction value Pfc determining power to be outputted by the DC/DC converter 2.

25 The electric power instruction value Pfc is inputted into a current converter 9 and multiplies by the gain transforming electric power into current, and outputs the fuel cell output current setting

value IREF1 to the current limiter 8. The current limiter 8 inputs the fuel cell output current setting value IREF1 and the fuel cell voltage E_f detected with a voltage detector SNS2, and outputs the fuel cell current output instruction value IREF2 to a current regulator 7.

5 The current regulator 7 controls the gate pulse GP2 for driving the DC/DC converter 2 so that the fuel cell current detection value IFC detected with a current detector CT3 coincide with the battery current output instruction value IREF2.

10 The converter 3 controls the voltage E_c of the DC side of the converter 3 by a DC voltage controller 10. A current detector CT2 detects the current I_{sys} which flows the reactor L, the voltage detector SNS1 detects the voltage E_c of the capacitor C2 installed in the direct-current side of the converter 3, and the voltage E_c is inputted into the DC voltage controller 10 with the detected voltage value VL.

15 The DC voltage controller 10 outputs the gate signal GP1 for driving the converter 3.

20 Fig. 2 shows a DC voltage controller 10. The DC voltage controller 10 comprises a voltage regulator 13, a phase detector 12, and a coordinated current regulator 14. The voltage regulator 13 comprises, for example, a proportional and integral control element, and calculates a current instruction value I_{sys}^* which controls the output of the converter 3 so as to coincide the DC voltage instruction value E_{ref} with the detected DC voltage E_c , and outputs the current instruction value I_{sys}^* to the coordinated current regulator 14. The
25 phase detector 12 calculates the phase signal A_{sin} of amplitude "1" following the phase of the voltage detection value VL, and the

amplitude value V_{rms} of system voltage, and outputs it to the coordinated current regulator 14.

The current instruction value I_{sys}^* , the phase signal A_{sin} and the amplitude value V_{rms} are inputted into the coordinated current
5 regulator 14 together with the current I_{sys} detected by the current detector CT2.

Fig. 3 shows the detail of the coordinated current regulator. In the coordinated current regulator 14, current instruction I_{sys}^* and the phase signal A_{sin} are inputted into a multiplier Pr1 and the
10 multiplier Pr1 multiplies these input values and outputs a current instruction value I_a^* having the amplitude I_{sys}^* and the sine wave form. As the phase signal A_{sin} is adjusted to the sine wave form following a-phase of system voltage, the current instruction I_a^* becomes the current instruction value at power factor 1 of the a-phase.

15 The current instruction I_a^* is inputted into the subtracter defa and a multiplier Pr2, and the multiplier Pr2 multiplies the input value I_a^* by "-1", and outputs a current instruction value I_b^* of b-phase. The subtracter defa inputs the current instruction value I_a^* and a a-phase current I_{sysa} of a current detection value, and
20 calculates difference dI_a , and outputs it to a current regulator 15a. Similarly, the subtracter defb inputs a current instruction value I_b^* and a b-phase current I_{sysb} of the current detection value, and calculates difference dI_b , and outputs it to a current regulator 15b.

The voltage amplitude value V_{rms} is an average value of the
25 voltage V_L of the electric power system 4 to which the converter 3 is connected, and it is supplied to a multiplier Pr3 as an instruction value. The multiplier Pr3 multiplies the voltage amplitude detection

value V_{rms} and the phase signal $Asin$ and outputs a voltage feed-forward instruction value Va^* having amplitude V_{rms} and the sine wave form

5 If the phase signal $Asin$ is adjusted to the sine wave which follows a phase of system voltage, the voltage feed-forward instruction Va^* coincides mostly with the voltage instruction value of a-phase.

The voltage feed-forward instruction Va^* is inputted into a multiplier $Pr4$ and the adder Ada , and a multiplier $Pr4$ multiplies the input value Va^* by "-1", and outputs a voltage feed-forward instruction value Vb^* of b-phase to an adder Adb .

15 The current regulator 15a and 15b adjust each output value Via and Vib so that the inputted differences may be made zero. Each output value of the current regulator 15a and 15b is inputted into an adder Ada and Adb , respectively, and an adder Ada outputs Vao^* , as a result of adding voltage feed-forward instruction value Va^* and the output value Via to the PWM operation element 16. The adder Adb outputs Vbo^* as a result of adding voltage feed-forward instruction value Vb^* and the output value Vib to the PWM operation element 16.

20 The PWM operation element 16 outputs the gate pulse $GP1$ for operating a single phase inverter to the gate circuit of the converter after comparing inputted Vao^* and Vbo^* with a triangular wave.

25 Fig. 4 shows the current regulator which drives the DC/DC converter 2. The current regulator 7 inputs the current instructions $IREF2$ and the current detection value IFC into the subtracter $def4$, and the subtracter $def4$ calculates the difference between the current

instruction value IREF2 and the current detection value IFC, and
outputs it to the current regulator 17. The current regulator 17
adjusts each output duty instruction value Db^* so as to make the
inputted difference zero and outputs output value Db^* to a pulse
5 operation element 18.

The current regulator 17 is a PI regulator, and the output
value Db^* appears as change of the level. The pulse operation
element 18 outputs the gate pulse GP2 for operating the DC/DC
converter 2 after comparing the inputted value Db^* with a triangular
10 wave to the gate circuit of the DC/DC converter 2.

Fig. 5 shows the electric power instruction operation element
4. The electric power instruction operation element 4 inputs the
voltage detection value VL and the current detection value IL, and
calculate load power using an electric power operation element 19,
15 and calculates the electric power instruction value Pfc following the
load power. Moreover, it multiplies the electric power instruction
value Pfc by the predetermined gain with the current converter 20,
and output the control signal SV which operates the valve VV for fuel
regulation.

20 Fig. 6 is a block diagram showing the current limiter 8, and
Fig. 7 is a diagram explaining the operation of the current limiter 8.
The current limiter 8 comprises a limit value operation element 21
which inputs the battery voltage Ef and outputs the limit value ILIM,
and a limiter 22 which inputs the current instruction value IREF1
25 and the limit value ILIM, and outputs the battery current instruction
value IREF2.

When the fuel cell voltage Ef usually maintained at the

predetermined value falls down, the limit value operation element 21 reduces the current limit value ILIM as a function ILIM of Ef (Ef) according to (1) formula, and outputs the current limit value ILIM (Ef) to the limiter 22.

5
$$ILIM(Ef) = \{I_{max}/(E_{al} - E_{pr})\} \times Ef - I_{max} \times E_{pr}/(E_{al} - E_{pr}) \quad --(1)$$

Where Eal: voltage drop alarm level, Epr: voltage drop protection level, I_{max}: rated output current of the DC/DC converter 2.

The operation is explained referring to Fig. 7. In the normal state when the fuel cell voltage detection value Ef is higher than the
10 voltage drop alarm level Eal, the current limit value ILIM is set as the rated output current value I_{max} of the DC/DC converter 2. At this time, ILIM ≥ IREF1 is satisfied and a current instruction value is expressed as a relation of formula(2) .

$$IREF2 = IREF1 \quad -- (2)$$

15 For example, the current instruction value IREF2 follows the instruction value Pfc of the electric power instruction operation device 6 and take a value between the limit values ILIM (ILIM = I_{max} in this case) and zero. At this time, the fuel which suited the current instruction value IREF2 is supplied to the fuel cell, and the I-V
20 characteristic of the fuel cell at this time is State A.

For example, when abnormalities occurs in the fuel cell system during operation of the state A, the I-V characteristic of the fuel cell moves to State B, and the fuel cell voltage detected value Ef falls below the voltage drop alarm level Eal. In this case, the current
25 limit value ILIM falls down according to formula (1). At this time, the current limiter 8 inputs a fuel cell voltage Ef and the current instruction value IREF1 and calculates the current limit value ILIM,

and outputs IREF2 according to formula (3).

Where $I_{REF1} > I_{LIM}$, $I_{REF2} = I_{LIM}$ -- (3)

Thereby, the output current IFC of the fuel cell 1 begins to fall down.

When the voltage Efc of the fuel cell falls down to the voltage drop
5 protection level Epr ($E_{fc} = E_{pr}$), the current instruction value IREF2
become 0, and the output current IFC of the fuel cell 1 also becomes
zero.

The voltage drop protection level Epr is decided considering
the fuel cell life (deterioration). Moreover, it may consider as a target
10 value from the operation actual result of the number day of the past,
and the setting method of minus several% of the target value etc. may
be used. The voltage alarm level Eal should just set up an alarm level
like plus several% of the protection level.

According to the present embodiment, as the fuel sell voltage
15 is detected and the current instruction value of DC/DC converter for
controlling the fuel cell is restricted, the fuel cell current can always
be controlled as a limit value, without being influenced by change of
the output electric power instruction value of the fuel cell. When
abnormalities of the fuel cell voltage down occurs, for example, fuel
20 shortage, the current of the fuel cell is restricted and deterioration of
the fuel cell may be prevented.

The current instruction value is restricted and decreased as
the restriction method of a current instruction value, so as to make
the fuel cell current of the voltage drop protection stop level zero. For
25 this reason, even if operation continues just before reaching the
voltage drop protection stop level, the fuel cell current is set to about
0 and it can prevent deterioration of the fuel cell.

Next, other embodiment of the operation of the invention will be explained. Fig. 8 is a block diagram showing the system configuration of the operation control apparatus of the fuel cell by an embodiment 2. The diagram shows a voltage type power converter with the function to transform the AC electric power of single-phase AC electric power or single phase AC into DC electric power. The same reference signs as fig.1 show the same parts of the Fig. 1 and explanation is omitted.

Fig. 8 differs from the first embodiment in that the fuel cell(FC) 1 is connected to the DC side of the capacitor C2 of the converter 3 which transforms DC electric power into AC electric power. The detection value IL of the current detector CT1 installed in the input of load 5, and the detection value VL of a voltage detection means PT to detect the voltage of the electric power system 4 are inputted into the electric power instruction operation element 6. The electric power instruction operation element 6 outputs the opening signal SV of the valve VV for the fuel regulation supplies to the valve VV and calculates the electric power instruction value Pfc.

The electric power instruction value Pfc is inputted into the current converter 9 and multiplied by the gain transforming the electric power into the current, and outputs the output current setting value IREF1 of the fuel cell to the current limiter 8. The output current setting value of the fuel cell IREF1 and the fuel cell voltage Ef detected by the voltage detector SNS2 are inputted into the current limiter 8, and the current output instruction value of the fuel cell IREF2 is supplied to a current regulator.

Fig. 10 shows the current regulator 23. The current regulator

23 inputs the current instructions IREF2 and the current detection
value IFC into the subtracter def4, and the subtracter def4 calculates
the difference between the current instruction value IREF2 and the
current detection value IFC, and outputs it to the current regulator
5 17. The current regulator 17 adjusts the output current instruction
value I_{sys}^* of the converter and outputs the output value I_{sys}^* to the
AC current controller 24 so that the inputted difference may be made
zero. The current regulator 17 is a PI regulator.

Fig. 9 shows the AC current controller 24. The current
10 regulator 23 shown in Fig. 10 is used in place of the voltage regulator
13 of the DC voltage controller 6 shown in Fig 2. The AC current
controller 24 inputs converter output current instruction value I_{sys}^* ,
and outputs the gate signal GP1 to control the converter 3 so as to
coincide the output current I_{sys} of the converter 3 with the converter
15 output current instruction value I_{sys}^* .

According to the second embodiment, as the DC/DC converter
becomes unnecessary in addition to the effect of first embodiment of
the system can be carried out efficiently.